

THE FEMALE LABOUR FORCE IN AN AGING SOCIETY

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Summary

This paper outlines some of the main features of female labour force participation today and some of the more important changes which may influence the participation of women in the labour force in future years. It reviews these trends in the context of the aging of the population and its implications for consumption and production patterns and for derived labour force requirements, including those for women. Anticipated technological advance and shortages of materials and energy are considered as potential catalysts to change over the years to and beyond the year 2000.

Historical and Socioeconomic Perspectives on the Female Labour Force

Since the appearance in 1946 of Mary Beard's classic study, Women as a Force in History, various aspects of what Elise Boulding has termed "the fifth world, the underside of history, and the gender-based undergirding of structural dualism in the third world" (Boulding, 1977: 9) have been examined in considerable detail, including women's property and political rights, marital relationships, fertility and childbearing functions, talents, skills and mental processes, and participation in the labour force (for Canada, Cook, 1976; Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1970; Stephenson, 1973; and others). The interest in the women's sector has been evidenced by reports of committees and special bodies and numerous books and

journal articles relating to both developed and developing countries. The publication of a number of international comparisons dealing with the role of women, including a Handbook of International Data on Women, and special studies by the International Labour Organization and the United Nations, has facilitated analysis of women's labour force activities at the global level (Youssef, 1974; Boserup, 1970; Standing, 1978: 9-24; Journal of International Affairs, 1976-77, 30 (2); Boulding, et al., 1976; Giele and Smock, 1977; Kupinsky ed., 1977; and others).

So far as labour force participation is concerned, the role of women has varied both across the world and over the centuries. Beard has shown that in ancient times females often played roles which were equal to, and sometimes superior to, those of males, and that the so-called subjection of women has been of relatively recent origin (Beard, 1946: 270-309). Allen's study, The Price of Women, suggests that after World War I women in the United States had virtually achieved equality of work opportunity with men but renounced it for a less burdensome load of responsibility (Allen, 1971: 22-24). And Boserup's Woman's Role in Economic Development shows that in many parts of the world today--especially in developing countries where polygamy characterizes the marital arrangements, female participation in the labour force is as important, and sometimes more important, than that of men (Boserup, 1970: 37-51). Some authors have tried to generalize that female labour force participation decreases with economic growth, or that it can be represented by a U-shaped curve which first goes down and then turns upward as economic development occurs (Schmidt, 1976-77: 257; Durand, 1975: 131-38). Stanley Kupinsky has suggested that three distinct patterns of female activity rates can be seen: distinctly low ones (below 20%) in India, Latin America and the Moslem (Arab) countries;

medium ones (20-39%) in Hong Kong, Singapore, Southeast Asia, Western Europe and Japan; and high ones (over 40%) in Eastern Europe and the United States (Kupinsky, ed., 1977: 370). Since levels, patterns, and trends vary widely between and within countries, obviously generalizations about female labour force participation can be misleading (Standing, 1978: 12).

The traditional role of women has been described as that of "breeder-feeder-producer" wherein "the breeding of babies and the feeding of humans of all ages is almost exclusively the work of women, above and beyond other productive processes in which she is engaged" (Boulding, 1977: 55). Most of these activities have been carried on in some sort of marriage arrangement, although customs have varied with societies and over time (Davis and Blake, 1956). For countries of the Western World, before the days of the industrial revolution, the efficiency of the marriage institution required that the wife perform childbearing and childrearing duties for which she was obviously best suited, and the husband provide sustenance through the use of his superior physical strength and prowess. The industrial revolution took work out of the home, chiefly affecting males at first. Improvements in the methods of production, extension of education to women, and changes in social attitudes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, meant that females were able to perform more and more jobs previously the preserve of men, and women gradually entered the world of paid employment. "In Canada, by 1891, one-eighth of the Canadian labour force was female" (Royal Commission, 1970: 7). Rising standards of living and higher levels of education selectively broadened opportunities to women in the world of work outside the home.

Over the same period important improvements in health extended the lives of both males and females in the countries affected by the industrial revolution. Advances in medical and sanitation facilities reduced the need for a large number

of offspring in order to ensure continuation of the family and of society in the future, and by the end of World War II the traditional purpose of marriage--procreation--could be accomplished within a few years with little wastage of maternal or infant life. Because the improvements in mortality control were almost world wide, by the middle of the present century the global population was growing so fast that it became evident that at some time in the future there would be insufficient resources to feed, clothe and care for all of the world's population (Lester R. Brown, 1978: 128-160; Johannes Overbeek, 1976: 76-98; Jay W. Forrester, 1971; *passim*). It appeared as though women's prime biological task, the conceiving and raising of children was almost obsolescent (Allen, 1971: 134). Social disapproval of childless marriages diminished, and by the '60s the fertility rate had declined significantly in most modern countries. Women's time and energies were no longer exhausted by family responsibilities, and women were able to take part in a greater variety of pursuits than ever before. More and more women entered the labour force, attracted by the desire for material comforts and sometimes for the necessities of life, and goaded on by the rising costs of obtaining them.

Interest in recruiting women into the labour force after World War II arose primarily because the low fertility during the '30s and '40s, plus wartime losses of adult males, led to a shortage of workers in many industrialized countries at a time when peacetime reconstruction, followed by prosperity during the '50s and '60s, postulated a need for more workers. In some countries the shortage of workers was offset through immigration, frequently of a seasonal or short term nature. In others, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, the U.S.S.R. and some communist countries of Eastern Europe, there was a surplus of single women available for labour force activity largely because of the deficit of working-age men (Galenson, 1973: 12, 74). However, in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and some countries of Western

Europe, where marriage was more widespread and occurring at earlier ages than before the war, and where male war losses were not so great, higher levels of inducements and supports had to be provided to make it both possible and worthwhile for a woman to be married, raise a family and work in the labour force, all at one and the same time. "In Sweden, for example, a labour shortage in the 1960s jogged the Government into action to make it easier for mothers to work outside the home--and during that decade the number of day nurseries trebled" (Mackie and Pattulo, 1977: 126). The role of the working woman became a familiar one, although her work opportunities and rate of pay sometimes left much to be desired. The struggle for improved social amenities such as day care centers which could remove barriers to women's fuller participation in the work force got under way in most countries, with limited success, since social acceptance for providing such measures was far from general (Mackie and Pattulo, 1977: 113). However, important strides were made in improving conditions for working women, in both legislation and practice. Equal pay for equal work laws were introduced by the International Labor Office Convention 100 and were adopted as goals by most industrial countries, although their effectiveness has been limited.

With the exceptions which have been noted, women generally have represented a pool of labour available at low rates of pay, since bargaining power for women has been almost non-existent. Women have been hired when other sources of cheap labour were scarce and when production demand was high. When males, looking for a job, and the self-supporting category of women had been fully hired, additional women could be recruited only by raising wages and improving work-related factors such as suitability of hours, availability of part-time work, and fringe benefits. Otherwise, women who were potential recruits to the labour force would remain dependent upon their husbands or other sources of income

rather than join in labour force activities. Under these conditions--approximately those which existed after World War II in the United States and Canada and some of the other industrialized countries--the lot of working women substantially improved. There was greater equality of treatment in employment as compared with males, increasing chances of advancement, diminished segregation of occupations for females, and levels of pay more comparable with those for men.

Current Perspectives

Across the world, women's share of the total labour force rose from 31.3% to 35.0% in the 25 year period after 1950. In 1975 it was 39.7% of the total labour force in more developed regions and 32.8% in less developed regions (United Nations, 1979: 132-8; 273, Table 164). These increased proportions of women workers generally also reflected higher participation rates per thousand for women in the labour force ages. In some European countries after World War II there was at first a decline in female participation rates, then an increase, as women moved out of agriculture and into service occupations (Denmark, Finland, France, Rumania, and the U.S.S.R.). Women's labour force participation in Canada and the United States was somewhat lower than for developed countries generally; it had reached 27.5% and 32.7% respectively of women of labour force ages by 1975. In Australia and New Zealand, where demographic trends in the postwar period were roughly similar to those for Canada and the United States, women's labour force participation was lower still, at 27.3% and 24.1% across all ages. The highest rates of participation were in the U.S.S.R. where 90.0% of women 25 to 54 years of age, 46.2% of women of all ages were in the labour force in 1975. Table I presents some selected data of female labour force participation in some countries of the world as published by the I.L.O. after attempts to reduce discrepancies in age categories and inconsistencies in coverage of occupations and part-time work.¹

In most developed countries, participation rates of women are generally lower than those of men. For ages prior to marriage the female rates are very high, approaching those of men, but then they tend to decline until the age when a woman's childbearing has been completed. After that they rise again, usually to a level somewhat lower than the pre-marriage peak (Vatter, 1976: 211-214, and others). In some countries there has been a recent tendency for more married women to stay in the labour force during childrearing years, so that the two peaks of labour force participation are flattening out into a plateau. While the participation of married women in the labour force is increasing in many countries, generally women who are single--including widowed, divorced, separated and never married--are most numerous. Like men, labour force participation of women is positively related to education² and urban residence. Unlike men, it is negatively associated with being married and with having a family. For married women there are also negative correlations between level of family income and size of family; ages of children are positively related, with women being more likely to enter the work force as their children get older (Ostry, 1970: 154; Ostry, 1966: 21-2; Boyd, Eichler and Hofley, 1976: 30; and others). The social and institutional forces which contribute to these female work patterns have been widely analyzed and no attempt will be made to summarize them here (see special journal issues of Concerned Demography, 1974; Dialogue, 1970; also studies by Mackie and Pattulo, 1977; Youssef, 1974; Giele and Smock, 1977; Smith, 1973; Eichler, 1973; and others).

As expected, the occupational distribution of women indicates a concentration of employment in traditional women's work such as teaching, nursing, sales and certain clerical occupations. However, in some European countries such as Finland, Sweden, and the U.S.S.R., proportions of women in

the professions, particularly medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and law, are quite high, even higher than in the United States (Galenson, 1973: 107). Typically in both the professions and the more traditional occupations, women cluster at the bottom of the work pyramid, receive lower wages, achieve lower levels of skill, and are accorded less responsibility and lower prestige than males (Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport, 1971: 20-24; and others). While some improvement may be occurring with relation to women's accessibility to certain lines of work, there is evidence that reduced segregation may be counter-balanced by wider salary differentials between men and women in those occupations (Gunderson, 1976: 122; Canada. Health and Welfare Canada, 1978: 13; Galenson, 1973: 107).

Economics of Female Labour Force Participation

Galenson's study of trends in employment of women across industrialized European countries in comparison with the United States led her to conclude that while "...even within the present environment there is room at the top for talented or determined women--in many fields, if not in all, in every country," women were nowhere equal in the labour market to men (Galenson, 1973: 114, 105; also I.L.O., 1963: 53-59). Recent studies such as those by Boulding and Giele indicate that the situation is not much changed (Boulding, 1977: Giele, 1978). Women typically work in a limited range of occupations, usually the least skilled and the worst paid;³ the proportions of women in the upper echelons of management are far below the representative proportions of women who have achieved the necessary skills, education and abilities to perform top level jobs; and the salaries of women who "reach the top" are typically 10% to 15% below those of men in the same position (Galenson, 1973: 7).

Initially there seem to be logical reasons for these differentials. Women cannot perform certain types of work because of lower physical strength than males. Women are handicapped as workers by their childbearing and childrearing functions. They drop in and out of the labour force and often work part-time rather than full-time. They are less mobile and have higher absenteeism than male workers. Women's own attitudes towards work are frequently not career-oriented; they often lack ambition for promotion. Such characteristics reflect both a degree of job commitment lower than that for men and a shorter work life expectation (I.L.O., 1963: 58; Galenson, 1973: 104; Allen, 1971: 17-41). While the disruptions to continuity in labour force responsible for women's shorter work life are basically counter-productive (Mincer and Polachek, 1974: 576-108), Sandell and Shapiro found that "The 'depreciation' of human capital on women's earnings while they are out of the work force are estimated to be only about one half of 1 percent per year" (Sandell and Shapiro, 1978: 115). Of course, only work for monetary compensation is included here.

The omission of consideration of the work of women in the family and the household when assessing social product was questioned long ago (1900) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in her book on Women and Economics, where she argued that the labour of women in the household had a genuine economic value (Gilman, 1900: 13). This has been echoed many times, as in a recent paper by Ann Markusen in The Review of Radical Political Economy (Markusen, 1977). Essentially the points made are that since women in families and households affect the development and maintenance of the population's genetic base, as

well as the state of health, work attitudes, and sense of responsibility of individual workers--factors which affect both the individual's productive capacity and society's productive capacity as a whole--omitting them from the social balance sheet is tantamount to overlooking the work of almost half a society's population.

Even if the productivity of women in families and households could somehow be incorporated into the human investment-returns analysis, the theory's usefulness is limited. Especially as a tool for the analysis of wages--which is what its protagonists would most like it to be--it is largely out of touch with twentieth century practices which often relate more to the existence of opportunity and other costs and to collective bargaining procedures than to the estimated total value of returns from lifetime work. Where opportunity costs (i.e., known rates of pay for other activities which are available to the worker) exist, a worker will not work below that level of wages--which in countries with minimum wage and unemployment insurance legislation is politically determined. In the case of women, there are often disopportunity costs associated with child care and family support which determine the minimum level of wages which will justify employment, so that such women drop out of the labour market when the wage rate declines below the necessary level. These disopportunity costs can be influenced by political decisions about the extension and subsidization of social welfare provisions such as child care facilities. Special allowances and wages for housework, which are in existence in countries such as France, and are being urged in others, can also affect the employment of women as disincentives to working (Galenson, 1973: 70; Cook and Eberts, 1976: 146-153). Such disincentives, like opportunity costs, set minimum levels for women's wages below which women are unlikely to enter the labour force.

A collective bargaining model is probably most appropriate for explaining the derivation of the level of wages in developed countries, since it substitutes wage rates won by union negotiation for the lowest level of wages that might otherwise be paid. If the negotiated wage is above the level of disincentives or disopportunity costs to women, it will encourage their labour force participation. If it is below women affected by disincentives and disopportunity costs will tend to drop out of the labour force.

Either of the approaches outlined above appears to be more appropriate for explaining the levels of wages for females in the labour market under modern conditions than the human investment-returns approach. The latter may be useful for analyzing whether or not the individual or society should invest in the costs of training or education, but it is not a realistic tool for indicating whether or not the person who has benefitted from that education should be hired, particularly in societies which have problems employing all their educated population. Nor does the human investment-returns approach have much meaning for deciding the levels of salaries and wages. Such decisions in today's society will be reached upon the basis of demand-supply relationships. Where demand exceeds supply, under conditions of competition and where union-negotiated wages are not above the market wage, the revenue from the produce of the last labourer hired will determine the level of wages. In this situation, the supply of female labour will be lower when the going rate of wages is below the combined levels of disincentives and opportunity (disopportunity) costs. If the demand for labour (male and female) falls below the supply of workers, the rate of return will be decided on the basis of opportunity (disopportunity) costs, disincentives, and collective bargaining and the number of workers hired will be lower than if such rigidities did not exist.⁴

Because women often have greater disopportunity costs than do men, their labour force participation tends to be more curtailed than that of men.

Potential Effects of Aging of the Population and Related Factors

Changes in composition of population can have a wide variety of social and economic implications. In the decades of the present century up to World War II, the effects of aging of the population during the 1920s and '30s in many advanced countries led to concern about a deficiency of consumer demand which was seen as a prime reason for widespread unemployment during the depression years. The problem today is rather different. It centers about an apparent inability to meet a large backlog of demands, particularly those relating to health and social welfare (including clinics, day care centers, environmental clean-up, etc.) which, because of rising labour costs, increasing shortages of energy and raw materials, and a deterioration of the terms of trade for many developed countries, are becoming increasingly unobtainable (Sweezy, 1975: 41). Much of the difficulty arises out of the problem of maintaining high levels of productivity in a period of transition to a stationary or no-growth population.

With the aging of the population currently under way in Canada and other modern industrialized countries, substantial shifts in the patterns of consumption demand will enforce changes in production. We can expect restructuring of society's production patterns to continue until well after the year 2000--and possibly until around the year 2040 in Canada, when the population may reach stationarity involving little or no further change in age distribution (Romaniuc, 1973: 10). In the meantime, as production of one kind of good or service declines, production of another kind of good or service will have to take up the slack or else, as Keynes, Hansen and others pointed out over 50 years ago, and as Spengler, Sauvy and others have noted more recently, we shall have an economy characterized

by declines in real income and standards of living (Keynes, 1935; Hansen, 1938; Spengler, 1974: 149-50; Sawy, 1976: 63-73). At present, the rising costs of labour and raw materials is placing a squeeze upon profits which may discourage sufficient investment for the needed structural readjustments, including redeployment of labour.

The high proportion of young people who have just entered the work force provides a readily available supply of relatively well-trained labour which can fill work force requirements for the present and immediate future if investment capital can maintain the necessary capital-labour ratio. However, in a few years the effects of fertility decline from the late 1950s will be felt, and in the absence of substantial immigration, the number of new recruits to the labour force will fall off. Assuming that there is no large scale immigration of workers, four groups may then be available for employment needs of new industries: (1) workers displaced by machinery and improved organization; (2) workers in search of better wage and job opportunities; (3) workers outside of the usual working ages; (4) female workers not currently active in the labour force. The first two groups are likely to prove relatively expensive in terms of wages and salaries since their starting incomes will relate to the length and breadth of their work experience (Spengler, 1975: 9). The third and fourth groups, while lower priced and potentially more adaptable to the part-time and short-term demands of production adjustments, would be in direct competition for jobs with males in the prime working force ages. In the event of an inadequate supply of males in the working ages, women could be an important source of labour force maintenance. Indeed, if women were better educated, available at lower rates of pay, or favoured by policies designed to overcome discrimination, they might displace or stimulate the withdrawal of some males (Spengler, 1978: 102).

Future female labour force participation could be particularly helpful in easing the adjustment pattern for the sector where greatest growth in demand is projected--the service industries, many of which are traditionally staffed with women. To the extent that women are the most suitable workers for that sector, women's labour force opportunities ought to increase as the population grows older, irrespective of the demand for labour in other industrial sectors. However, competition from men for these jobs could displace many of the women workers, particularly at the top of the work pyramid for that sector (Browning, 1975: 57; Galenson, 1973: 113). Ironically, this infiltration of men into women's usual spheres of activity might reduce segregation of occupations for women but cause a further spread in salary differentials, strengthening a trend identified earlier in relation to the work of Morley Gunderson and others.

Whether or not women will attempt to expand their participation in the labour force will depend upon a number of relatively unpredictable conditions, including particularly the level of disincentives and disopportunity costs affecting women, which will relate to the degree of public support which is extended through the provision of day care services, improved transportation facilities, availability of part-time employment, income tax provisions, and a whole host of social and institutional arrangements which in the past have proven to be effective deterrents to female labour force participation, particularly during the childbearing and childrearing years (Sweet, 1973: 55-134, and others). Women may themselves overcome some of these barriers by remaining childless or perpetuating the low levels of childbirth which have occurred in recent years, decisions which in the long run may not be beneficial to society if they involve negative rates of replacement (Veevers, 1977: 97-103); Sauvy, 1969: 319).

Whether or not to have children, a question which is apparently purely personal, may in itself be affected by social pressures related to changing age structure, as suggested by Richard A. Easterlin's "What Will 1984 be Like?

Socioeconomic Implications of Recent Twists in Age Structure," Karol Krotki's "The Social and Demographic Consequences of the Divergences Between the Age Pyramid and the Opportunity Pyramid" and by several papers by Nathan Keyfitz (Easterlin, 1978; Krotki, 1975; Keyfitz, 1971, 1972, 1973).

Easterlin, Krotki and Keyfitz all see times of relative labour shortages as times of opportunity, particularly for young males who are able to move up the promotional ladder of their firms more quickly and to obtain better paid and more prestigious positions than they otherwise would. The effects vary for women, depending upon their ages. Younger women are more apt to marry and have families under these conditions, and since these activities compete with their labour force role, female labour force participation of younger women goes down. Older women benefit since there is less competition from other sources of labour, so their participation increases.

On the other hand, if there is a relatively large proportion of young males in the labour force, as is occurring in Canada and many developed countries today, it is much more difficult for young men to become established in good positions and to obtain high salaries. They are in a less favourable position to marry and support families. Consequently, young women--married and unmarried--go to work, reducing the chances for older women finding work, since their activities are substitutable for those of younger women.

This analysis has a number of built-in assumptions with respect to the reasons for and degree of substitutability between younger and older males and females, and between males and females, which may or may not be justified over the long haul. In part it assumes that the domination of the labour market by male values will continue, and that the social forces which have contributed to the female worker's shorter work life expectation will be perpetuated so that the female will continue to be less productive. Preferences between female

labour force participation and childbearing and childrearing that have existed in the past are presumed to continue--which may or may not be supportable in future years. If these assumptions hold for the future, then women in the younger ages can be expected to continue to have a high rate of labour force participation for at least the next five or six years, but their wages will be relatively low and there will be high unemployment for the group since they will be in competition for jobs with a proportionately large group of young men. Older women will also find unemployment rates high and wages low, but those who hold onto their jobs may be relatively better paid than their younger competitors..

A factor which may be overlooked here is that while the decline in fertility is the potentially more important one in respect to overall age distribution, mortality decline may also influence women's future desire to work in the labour force. Married women have been increasingly outliving their husbands, partly because women marry older men, and partly because women's expectation of life tends to improve more than that for men when progress is made in reducing age specific levels of mortality. Consequently, aging of the population over future years may enlarge the proportions of older women more than it will enlarge the proportions of older men. This will make women increasingly at risk of suffering poverty in old age if they have remained dependent on their husbands during their working years. As women's awareness of this vulnerability increases, and if social attitudes towards women's participation in the work force are supportive, increasing numbers of young women may become more career-oriented, so that levels of work commitment may be increased significantly. Prime goals would be the achievement of financial security in old age, and, given time and opportunity, women's work life expectancies could approach and perhaps equal those of men. Shapiro and Hott in a recent paper in Demography have expressed the belief that there will be "increased investment in

on-the-job training by women, decreases in the degree of occupational segregation by sex, and diminution of wage differences between men and women," expectations which would be consistent with greater career commitment on the part of women (Shapiro and Mott, 1979: 208).

Of course, women's decision to work in the labour force is only one part of the problem, because decisions to work have to be made within the context of opportunities to work, if they are to be meaningful. Where opportunities to work are non-existent, the decision of women to participate in the work force merely means an increase in the statistics for unemployment, since their status simply changes from that of a person not looking for work to that of one looking for work.

Opportunities for female employment in future years will depend partly upon availability of workers from all sources. Males in the working ages, immigrants, and workers aged 65 and over, may all compete for jobs. Competition for jobs with males in the working age has already been discussed. It is difficult to conjecture how substantial the immigrant and 65 and over contributions may be, since both will be influenced by government programs and legislation. Aging of the population may put pressure upon governments to encourage relaxation of retirement provisions at age 65--as has already happened in the United States--so that more oldsters will compete effectively for jobs. Substantial immigration is not likely to be sustained over the immediate future; however, in the early 1980s the program could be expanded. Competition with women for jobs is likely to come from any of these sources; the greatest threat could be from men in the working ages and from immigrants, since the 65 and over group is unlikely to opt for full employment opportunities and is likely to stabilize in number over time.

Concurrent with the effects of aging are the problems arising out of shortages of energy and raw materials, which cannot be dealt with at all adequately here, but which cannot be ignored either. Since these factors push up the costs of production, their overall effect is to reduce the returns on capital investment, discouraging its availability. Additions to capital, other than for replacement, may no longer be required once a no-growth society has been attained, but in the interim new capital investment will be needed to accommodate structural adjustments, so interest rates will rise. The increasing cost of capital, associated with higher costs of raw materials and energy as supplies dwindle, and escalating costs of labour as the costs of living are pushed up, is likely to generate considerable inflation over future years (Brown, 1978: 169-77).

One way to overcome inflation is to increase productivity by introducing innovative technology on a large scale--which is already under way in some advanced countries. This technology is displacing large segments of the labour force, and will render the knowledge and contributions of many other sectors obsolescent in a few years. As Alfred Toffler has indicated in Future Shock (Toffler, 1970), the entire scenario will tend towards constant change, involving few if any long term, career-oriented opportunities for the labour force, whether male or female. It will, on the other hand, reinforce the trend, inherent in structural adjustment associated with aging, towards numerous part-time short term operations, a development particularly suited to the interests of the female labour force, as evidenced by past patterns of female labour force activity. The change in work patterns would be likely to mean that the differences in work life expectations between men and women in the labour force, discussed earlier in this paper, would not be meaningful, since opting in and out of the labour force would be a desirable mode of operation, providing needed flexibility.

Under these conditions males and females will be more competitive for job opportunities. This may lead to pressure for the introduction of policies such as wages for housewives, which, although a goal of the women's liberation movement, would have the effect of reducing women's paid labour force participation.⁵ Nancy Smith Barrett has warned: "Despite the large and growing number of female-headed households, the notion that jobs should be apportioned on the basis of the male family head's needs could shape attitudes about 'women's place' in the economy of the 1980s" (Barrett, 1976: 157).

Obviously social attitudes towards women's working will have an important bearing upon the degree of female participation in the future work force, since public pressures for the removal of existing deterrents--such as the lack of day care facilities for children of working mothers--will be needed if women's work force participation is to be maintained or to increase in the absence of continuing low levels of fertility. Even if low levels of fertility do persist, the support of labour unions will be vital, if males become intolerant towards female labour force participation. Unions have not been particularly supportive towards female workers in the past (Geoffroy and Ste. Marie, 1971: 93-118; Wertheimer, 1976: 207); improvement in the lot of the working woman will tend to be slower if this continues to be the case.

Conclusions

Future female labour force participation in developed societies is difficult to predict. It depends upon counteracting influences whose strength cannot be gauged effectively at the present time.

The attitude of society (including family reactions) towards women's working will affect the readiness of individual women to participate in the labour force, provided the opportunity exists for them to do so. Continuing increases in

prices of consumer goods and services may provide sufficient motivation for maintaining and possibly increasing women's interest in labour force activity, and for demographic reasons, women may become more career-oriented, with long-term commitments towards working activity. Technological improvements in the home may free up more of women's time for work force participation, while technological advances outside the home may alter work schedules in a manner more accommodating to women's needs.

Providing that immigration did not occur on a large scale, the aging of the population could be expected to result eventually in a shortage of workers in relation to persons in the dependent ages. Accordingly, around 1985 or 1986, unless immigration had filled the gap, there could be a shortage of young workers in relation to demand. Under most circumstances this would provide more jobs, for all takers, including females, but advances in technology may reduce the need for workers, particularly those who are unskilled. The female labour force could be adversely affected, since it has had a relatively higher proportion of unskilled workers than the male labour force in the past. The outlook is more favourable for women who are highly trained or in the professions.

Both attitudes towards women's working and availability of employment opportunities for women will ultimately depend upon the economy's ability to restructure production to the changing pattern of demands associated with aging of the population, a change which may be exacerbated by shortages of energy and raw materials, continuing inflation, and low profit margins on capital investment. Innovative technology, intended to overcome these problems, will revolutionize production patterns as well as indirectly affecting social relationships. The associated decline in job opportunities and competition for employment could create hostility towards women's working, particularly if a no-growth society is achieved, since the pie to be divided would no longer be growing.

TABLE 1

ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION

Women - participation rates

Age of women	World	More developed regions		Less developed regions
-15	3.2	0.4		3.8
15-19	36.9	37.9		36.5
20-24	51.3	66.3		45.7
25-44	50.9	59.7		46.8
45-54	51.6	60.4		45.6
55-64	33.3	31.8		34.5
65+	11.8	7.5		17.1
Total	29.1	35.4		26.4
	Canada	U.S.	Australia	N.Z.
-15	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.0
15-19	34.6	34.9	52.3	55.0
20-24	60.1	58.1	59.7	55.0
25-44	41.6	49.8	42.1	34.1
45-54	42.0	58.8	40.9	39.0
55-64	31.2	43.9	23.3	22.3
65+	4.9	8.9	4.1	3.4
Total	27.5	32.7	27.3	24.1
	Fed. Rep. Ger.	Finland	Sweden	U.S.S.R.
-15	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.0
15-19	63.3	33.9	35.1	33.8
20-24	69.0	63.9	59.3	81.4
25-44	49.8	68.6	54.5	92.9
45-54	48.5	63.0	57.4	84.0
55-64	27.6	40.1	36.4	18.0
65+	5.6	3.8	3.8	3.7
Total	31.7	38.9	32.3	46.2

Hungary had a 40.7% participation rate for all women in 1975; Bulgaria 45.9%; Czechoslovakia 44.2%; Japan 40.1%; Poland 48.6%; Rumania 49.1%.

(Data in this table refer to mid-1975. The data have been adjusted to conform to a standard concept of labour force which is defined to comprise all employed and unemployed persons. It covers employers, own account workers, employers, unpaid family workers, members of producers' cooperatives and members of the armed forces).

Source: International Labour Organization, Year Book of Labour Statistics 1978, Geneva: ILO, 1978. Special Table, 18-47.

¹Galenson's warning that: "A high labor-force participation rate is not invariably associated with progressiveness and a high status for women; just as often it indicates the opposite" should be kept in mind when reviewing these data, particularly for developing countries where labour force participation by women sometimes reaches high levels (Galenson, 1973: 2). Generally participation of women in the work force in developing countries is lower than in industrialized countries, although the work of a wife on behalf of her husband in agriculture and in home industries goes largely unrecorded and may equal or surpass that in more developed countries. The statistics do not generally cover these types of activities. The international data indicate that participation rates for females in developing countries are usually below those in developed regions to age 54 (note the exceptions pointed out by Boserup referred to on page 2 above), but older women have higher rates, presumably because they have no alternative means of support (United Nations, 1979: 273, Table 163).

²Standing, in Labour Force Participation and Development suggests that the hypothesis of a positive relationship between education and female labour force participation may be too glib, and that there are at least three separate underlying assumptions which have not been adequately distinguished: (1) the opportunity cost argument; (2) the association may merely reflect the effect of education on relative employment opportunities; (3) the association could be due to the effect of education on income aspirations.

Standing thinks none of them particularly convincing, especially for women (Standing, 1978: 141).

³Williamson in his paper "U. S. Labour Force and Occupational Differences in Sex" (Demography 16(1), Feb. 79: 73-88) and Gunderson in "Work Patterns," Chap. 4 in Opportunity for Choice, (Gail C. Cook ed., 1976: 93-142) indicate that occupational differentiation by sex has diminished in the U. S. and Canada over recent decades.

⁴Other factors such as transfer payments will also influence these decisions, but these questions are too complex for inclusion in the present discussion (Kreps, 1971: 33-35). Heckman, in a paper appearing in Econometrica in 1974, developed a model which includes a myriad of factors involved in the determination of women's wages, assuming non-price factors--such as the family's preference for having a woman at home--to be taken into account as well (Heckman, 1974). Unfortunately, as the model's author has recognized, it may be impossible to assign monetary value to all the factors.

⁵Allen has suggested in The Price of Women that persons now in the younger labour force ages may not be geared to the self-discipline implicit in high levels of commitment to labour force productivity and to career-oriented goals, and may welcome the opportunity to opt out of the labour force at frequent intervals, particularly if plans for guaranteed incomes become reality. Guaranteed incomes would affect the entire labour force in a manner similar to the effect of wages for housewives upon the female labour force--more persons would be inclined to opt out. If the need for labour input declines as a consequence of advances in technology, this might not be at all a bad thing. Giele has suggested that a revolution in sex roles could be a concomitant of the required system change and that "Nothing less than a new social contract is at issue" (Giele, 1978: 1).

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